

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
November 7, 2019
FINAL

Second Floor, City Hall
Commission Chambers
241 W. South Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Members Present: Gregory Milliken, Chair; Emily Greenman Wright, Vice Chair; Alfonso Espinosa; Sakhi Vyas; Shardae Chambers; Derek Wissner; Coreen Ellis

Members Excused: James Pitts

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Clyde Robinson, City Attorney; Pete Eldridge, Assistant City Planner; Beth Cheeseman, Code Administration Clerk/Cashier

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Milliken called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Planner Anderson proceeded with roll call and determined that the aforementioned members were present. Ms. Coreen Ellis arrived at the meeting at approximately 7:30pm.

C. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Planner Anderson clarified that P.C. #2019.08 should be under F. Public Meetings and not H. New Business. She reported there are no items of New Business.

Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Espinosa, moved approval of the November 7, 2019 Planning Commission agenda as amended. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Vyas, moved approval of the September 5, 2019 Planning Commission minutes. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

E. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

F. PUBLIC HEARINGS

P.C. #2019.08: 709 Axtell Street. The YWCA is requesting a special use permit to allow a transitional residence for up to 14 individuals at this location. [Recommendation: Approve the special use permit request for the transitional residence.]

Planner Eldridge came forward to present the Staff Report. The YWCA is proposing to set up a transitional residence at 709 Axtell Street for up to 14 individuals. He reported that the zoning is currently classified RM-15 (residential) with the future land use zoning to be R-2 (medium-density residential). Planner Eldridge reported the home to is 1770 square feet, with 6 bedrooms and 3 baths. The parking lot is gravel and can accommodate approximately six vehicles. Planner Eldridge then reviewed maps and pictures of the home and neighboring properties. He stated that the shelter coordinator passed out fliers in the neighborhoods and met with Steve Walsh from the Vine Neighborhood Association. Mr. Walsh provided a letter of support for the project. Planner Eldridge said that the applicant does meet criteria for a special use permit. He shared that transitional residences are allowed as a special use in RM-15; the proposed use meets all zoning requirements; housing needs in Kalamazoo include temporary housing and shelters. Planner Eldridge added that the proposed residence will be staffed and monitored by the YWCA.

Commissioner Espinosa expressed concern with potentially 14-unrelated people in the house with less than 300 square foot per bedroom. He asked how that would work for privacy issues. Planner Eldridge responded that the transitional residence will house men, women and children. In some cases, they believe that will include families or mothers with children. He stated the minimum requirement for two unrelated occupants is 100 square feet per bedroom. Planner Eldridge stated that the bedrooms technically have that capacity. In addition, the YWCA is planning on 12 residents with the capacity for 14 if necessary.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked if the residence on Oak Street was still operational. Planner Eldridge was unsure of the answer but stated there are no required separation distances between transitional residences in this zone.

The applicant, Sherry Brockway, Director of Emergency Response Services for the YWCA, came forward and informed Planning Commissioners that the human trafficking shelter on Oak Street is no longer operating. She said their lease on Oak Street ended in July and they decided to seek out a larger facility. Ms. Brockway stated that, due to labor trafficking, there is a need to house families. They hope to do so at the Axtell address. She said the shelter will be staffed 24 hours per day, they will have cameras, and they will provide case management, advocacy, and legal services throughout an individual's stay at the shelter. Their goal is for individuals to find safe housing on their own when they are to leave the program. Ms. Brockway said they also have funding through the Office of Victim Crime Act which means they can provide up to \$5,000 in housing for individuals being transitioned from this shelter. She added that they feel this will be a permanent house with long-term programming.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked for clarification of who can stay in the shelter. Ms. Brockway said this would only be for human trafficking victims.

Commissioner Wissner asked how many other shelters they have in Kalamazoo. Ms. Brockway said they have their domestic violence and sexual assault shelter. The Axtell Street location would be their second shelter.

Commissioner Chambers inquired about how long people can stay in the shelter. Ms. Brockway stated that it is a 90-day program. They do allow extensions based on safety needs, but it would never go past a year. Commissioner Chambers asked what kind of vehicles and traffic would be introduced to the neighborhood. Ms. Brockway stated there would be minimal traffic - case manager vehicles or the YWCA's vehicle. She said most of the individuals in the program use public transportation.

Commissioner Chambers asked how they keep up the confidentiality from people in these neighborhoods. Ms. Brockway stated they do not allow anyone to pick up or drop off at the location. New people are kept at the main facility for 24 hours before being moved to the human trafficking shelter.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked about the average victim in a trafficking situation. Ms. Brockway stated the average age they work with is between 35-40 years old. They don't take anyone under 18 years old.

Commissioner Vyas asked for explanation of the visitor policy. Ms. Brockway said no visitors allowed there. If people have appointments, they can bring people to the main building or the counseling building or they use public facilities.

Commissioner Milliken clarified that the operation at Axtell would be very similar as the operation at Oak St. Ms. Brockway stated that the operation of the shelter would be identical as the Oak Street.

Commissioner Milliken opened the public comment portion of the hearing.

Mr. Jeff Messer said he is not opposed to the special use permit but asked the Planning Commissioners to consider the concentration of transitional housing uses and group homes in the Vine neighborhood. He noted that since 2018 there have been 4 requests for special use permits for transitional housing. Three of those requests were for the Vine Neighborhood.

Ms. Shannon Winchester came forward and read a statement from another neighbor, Ms. Sarah Pratt. Ms. Pratt wrote that she has concerns about the amount of traffic and the number of staff and residents. She also expressed concern about neighborhood safety. Ms. Winchester said she was never notified of the shelter by YWCA staff. She only heard about it that morning. She also expressed concern about the number of people staying on the small lot.

Residents, Ms. Mallory Kruizenga and Ms. April Schmidt, expressed support for the shelter. Ms. Kruizenga said it is a great location for people to gain access to resources and she is not concerned about safety. Both she and Ms. Schmidt hope the neighborhood can come together in support and welcome for this shelter.

Ms. Terri Sieplinga, an employee of the YWCA and a survivor, came forward in support of the shelter. In response to safety concerns and cameras at the home, she said many people have cameras in their own homes. She said it is just what we do today. Ms. Sieplinga stated their survivors are coming from a life of trauma. They are not holding parties or looking for trouble, they are going to school and pursuing life goals and visions. They are looking for peace and restoration to redefine their lives. They want to be welcomed into a community with open arms.

Ms. Sasha Hoyle lives in the house next door to 709 Axtell. She expressed understanding of the need for housing in this community and the needs of victims of interpersonal violence. She said she never received a notice from the YWCA. Ms. Hoyle said she had concerns regarding traffic, people coming in and out, confidentiality and safety. She wondered how it would directly impact her family.

Ms. Carolyn Eckland stated that she was concerned about questions her kids will ask about the shelter. She wondered if the staffing at the shelter will be trauma-trained and know how to handle situations. She felt it was somewhat secretive and neighbors were informed at the last moment. Ms. Eckland asked why these types of requests seem to always be for the Vine Neighborhood – pointing out there are bus stops and groceries in most neighborhoods.

Mr. Wayne Deering said he has lived and worked in the Vine Neighborhood most of his life. He informed the Commissioners that he was not aware of any problems with the home on Oak Street. He believed there would be more problems from parking, garbage, noise and parties if this house remained student housing. He believed this shelter would be good for the community. Mr. Deering made the point that these people are not criminals, they are victims and he believes they will quietly blend in the neighborhood.

Commission Vyas, with support from Commissioner Greenman Wright, moved to close the public comment portion of the hearing. A voice vote was taken and passed.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked staff to elaborate more on the operation on the transitional home on Wall Street and if it was operational. She also asked how many special use permits exist in the vine neighborhood of this type total. Planners Anderson and Eldridge didn't have information about the Wall Street home, or a total tally of special use permits for the Vine Neighborhood.

Commissioner Wissner asked for clarification that the special use permit would stay with the property even if the YWCA leaves – permitting another transitional shelter to occupy that property. Planner Eldridge said if it was an identical use, then it wouldn't have to go before the Planning Commission. He said there is typically a variation in the type of use and then it would have to go back before them. Planner Anderson added that if a special use ceases to operate for a full year, then it has expired.

Commissioner Milliken asked City staff if there were any concerns, issues identified, or code violations known for the Oak Street shelter. Planners Eldridge and Anderson were not aware of any.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked the applicant to clarify outreach that was done. Ms. Brockway said they did two outreaches - personally delivering letters to the residents.

Commissioner Chambers asked if the staff would be trauma-trained and asked about the purpose of the cameras at the house. Ms. Brockway stated they will be trauma-trained YWCA employees. Employees are also required to have continuing education. She affirmed that the cameras are just to make sure the people in the shelter are safe. They do not indicate these people will harm anyone else.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked the applicant if there were any issues with the Oak Street house and if Public Safety was ever involved. Ms. Brockway stated that, overall, there were no problems. They called the police once for a minor incident. She also confirmed that the size of the house is the reason they chose the Vine Neighborhood.

Commissioner Milliken asked what the typical day would look like with traffic. Ms. Brockway said that the staff would have a car, but residents typically use public transportation or bikes. No visitors would be allowed at the shelter.

Commissioner Vyas, supported by Commissioner Chambers, moved to approve P.C. #2019.08: 709 Axtell Street: The special use permit request for a transitional residence.

Commissioner Vyas shared that this is a wonderful use of a large home. She said there are great qualities to the neighborhood, the size of home, transportation around it, and access to amenities. She didn't believe it would always be full to the maximum number of 14 people. Commissioner Vyas liked the fact that the YWCA could serve so many people in this house and she said she would support this.

Commissioner Espinosa expressed continued concern that they might outgrow this house very soon and find themselves in front of the Planning Commission again. He said in the future, he would like more clarity about the size of the rooms vs people who are not related. He also commented there is a concentration of these housing uses in the Vine Neighborhood. Commissioner Espinosa thinks the house is great, and he would be interested to learn more about how individuals go forward from a trafficking situation after the 90-day program.

Commissioner Chambers stated that she is in support of the housing. She encouraged the YWCA to do a better job of communicating with all the people in the neighborhood to make sure everyone knows, and it is not short notice.

Commissioner Wissner stated he is in full support of this shelter. While he agreed there is a concentration of these uses in the Vine Neighborhood, he wanted to acknowledge there will be no increase in number of shelters since the Oak Street shelter has been closed.

Commissioner Greenman Wright admonished the applicant for not putting a letter in the mail, especially considering the political canvassing at the same time. She acknowledged the concern of neighbors regarding the length of time and preparation for thinking about this. Commissioner Greenman Wright stated that it comes up more frequently for the Vine Neighborhood because of the density of housing. She

asked the City to find out if the applicants are planning to post a letter and figure out how they can help people interpret what “transitional housing” means.

Commissioner Milliken thanked everyone for coming. He stated that the comments were poignant, smart and heartfelt, and he appreciated everyone for coming forward. Change and the unknown can be tough, but the zoning ordinance leads to a decision. Commissioner Milliken summarized they’ve heard about a certain concentration of use in a neighborhood and a lack of guidance in decision making. He believed they can improve upon these areas as they look to the zoning ordinance, and changes to implement in the Master Plan.

Roll call vote taken and the motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Ellis abstained.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

H. NEW BUSINESS

None

I. CITIZENS’ COMMENTS (Regarding non-agenda items)

Mr. Jeff Messer came forward and stated that the YWCA’s shelter on Oak Street didn’t maintain their sidewalk last winter. He requested they maintain their section of the sidewalk and mow their lawn at the new location on Axtell. He asked staff if reports for code violations are transmitted to planning staff.

In response, Ms. Sieplinga stated that it was the landlord’s responsibility to maintain the sidewalk and mow the lawn. She hoped that it was noticed they did a good job removing bushes, raking and planting flowers and hanging flower baskets.

Planner Anderson stated that snow shoveling, and other violations can be reported online at Kalamazoocity.org/report. She indicated many warnings and violations were given last year and those details are noted in the property database.

J. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

Commissioner Urban came forward. He reinforced the comments that Commissioner Milliken made about the quality, earnestness and poignancy of the people who came forward to speak. He told the Commissioners he recorded the meeting and plans to get it to the public to show what goes on and to remind them it is a public meeting.

K. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

Planner Anderson pointed out next years proposed calendar. She noted changes and asked them to review it and be prepared to vote on it later.

Planner Anderson also shared they are working on adjusting the Public Participation Plan. She said it outlines how the City views different situation, how many people an action would impact, and the geographic area of the action. They take these factors into account to decide if they will do large or small meetings, mailers, door knocking. Planner Anderson said they have researched ordinances from other cities, and they are amending the document to specifically call out what the applicant does. The City does required noticing, and strongly encourages applicants to do outreach and report back to the Planning Commission. She said they need to clarify language of what an applicant should do, for example, if you do door knocking and don't reach someone. It is in draft form and is being reviewed. It is hoped to go before City Commission before end of year.

Planner Anderson announced that the Planning portion of CPED has moved to 245 N. Rose Street. Commissioner Wissner asked about long-term plans for the Stockbridge facility. Planner Anderson responded there will be some renovations to building and then Public Services will take over the building.

Commissioner Milliken asked how City Streets meetings have been going. Planner Anderson said they had their 2nd public meeting for streets design project on 23rd of October. They asked the community for their priorities street by street. She stated their next steps will be to have staff conduct several more meetings throughout the community, do a youth activity and some activities in neighborhoods discussing streets. Planner Anderson said they will also translate their walking audits into a text-based form so those with low vision can participate. She said this will lead to engineering consultants taking the identified priorities, looking at them on the streets to help model different scenarios and answer questions. They will then take the information back to the public, present different scenarios, have discussions, and then determine budget and phasing. She reminded Planning Commissioners this is a long-term project – 10-20 years.

L. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Espinosa asked about the in-street signage on Oakland Drive. He indicated that it's great, but dangerous if biking. Commissioner Espinosa inquired if that was the only sort of sign they will use or if they can do something flashing. Planner Anderson said they have done two types of signage, the stop for pedestrian signage and then the in-street signs. They have looked at the rapid response flashing beacon for certain locations. Planner Anderson said she appreciated him bringing forward that concern. She encouraged anyone in the cycling community to share concerns with Planning staff directly. She said they are always trying to balance space with signage. Commissioner Milliken asked if the signs were to remain all winter. Planner Anderson believed the intention was to leave the signs, but she didn't know about the bollard posts. She indicated she would be happy to get a confirmation from Director Baker.

Commissioner Chambers gave kudos to the City for the hands-on event for the streets. She said it was very nice to visually make up your own ideas for the roads and then receive explanation of requirements of how big/small to make it.

Planning Commission

November 7, 2019

Page 8 of 8

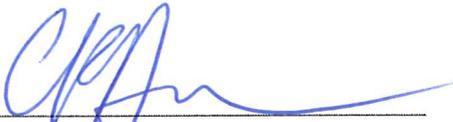
Commissioner Ellis expressed appreciation in knowing that the streets design projects are a long-term commitment. She said she did take part in the walking audits. She also expressed a concern about having the street signage up for winter.

Commissioner Milliken had the pleasure hearing Dr. Mona, Pediatrician from Flint who discovered lead issues. He said she complimented the City for remediating the lead service lines. Last year over 800 lines were removed in the city and next year 1300.

M. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 8:31pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Christina Anderson,
City Planner
Community Planning & Development